

# The Banksoniain #12

## An Iain (M.) Banks Fanzine

Mecon Special - August 2007

### Editorial

This issue reviews the critical and public reaction to *The Steep Approach to Garbadale*, as well as looking back at *Complicity*, and also into the pre-publication history of Iain Banks. There are also reports on many of the appearances there have been at readings and festivals, as well as on the TV and radio.

*Complicity* was the book that Iain actually set out to shock with. After being accused of this with *The Wasp Factory* for many years, he decided to do it on purpose. It is also the only Banks feature film to have reached the screen. The book and the film get the **Banksoniain** centre-page spread treatment.

Banks's unpublished early works include *The Hungarian Lift Jet* and *The Tashkent Rambler*. He has mentioned these a number of times in various interviews, and in a special Banks Obscura article the **Banksoniain** brings as much information as can be found about these projects.

We also have an exclusive peak behind the scenes of the *Espedair Street* tribute album project that Iain is working on with Gary Lloyd as the composer invited your editor to his studio.

Thanks for this issue go to French publisher Bragelonne, Peter Kenny, and Simon H Johnson (Keeper of the Iain Banks FAQ at <http://www.iainbanksfaq.haddonstuff.co.uk>).

Extra special thanks to Gary Lloyd for the time in his studio listening to the *Espedair Street* tracks as well as the pint in his local. As always the Banksoniain would not be produced if we didn't have TMH, Iain (M.) Banks.

Lookout for issue #13 in (early) February 2008, hopefully with details of the *Matter* publicity tour, and related events.

### Banks's Next Books

The next Banks book is an 'M' one, but more than that it is a Culture book which will make a lot of people very happy. It is called *Matter*, which was one of the working titles for his previous book. A mischief that Iain said was to confuse "those on the Internet". There is enough gossip and news to warrant an article on *Matter* inside on page #8.

The one after that will be a non-M, i.e. mainstream book. Iain wants it to be a complicated one along the lines of *The Bridge*, but he did add that he had been saying that for ten years.

### Banks Live

#### Expected appearances

Edinburgh International Book Festival  
Tuesday 14 August 2007

17:30 Amnesty International Reading  
20:00 Iain Banks **SOLD OUT**

See <http://www.edbookfest.co.uk/>

Hebridean Book Festival (Stornoway)  
20:00 Thursday 30 August 2007 (TBC)  
See <http://www.faclan.org/>

Shetland Book Festival (Lerwick)  
September 2007

Off The Page - Stirling Book Festival  
19:30 Monday 24 September 2007  
See <http://www.stirling.gov.uk/offthepage/>

Inverness Book Festival  
October 2007  
See <http://www.invernessbookfestival.com/>

Cheltenham Festival of Literature  
October 2007  
See <http://www.cheltenhamfestivals.com>

BSFA - Star Tavern, Belgravia, SW1X 8HT  
19:00 Wednesday 28 November 2007  
See <http://www.bsfa.co.uk/index.cfm/section.events>

## Media Scanner

A profile of Ian Rankin in the **Independent** (05/02/2007) noted that he had “broken Irvine Welsh and Iain Banks' records to have six titles in the Scottish top 10 best-sellers list simultaneously.”

The movie *Hot Fuzz* (released 14/02/2007 and now available on DVD) has a scene with a police sergeant character played by Bill Bailey (with straight hair) reading *Complicity*. A later scene has the same actor (with curly hair) reading *The State Of The Art*. Eventually the viewer finds out that the single actor is playing two parts – identical twins that have the same job.

Jennifer Cunningham in an article about neglected buildings associated with Scottish writers in the **Herald** (19/02/2007) mentioned that the Stromeferry Hotel mentioned in *Complicity* as “as the run-down hotel where a murder takes place” is listed “in the ‘at risk’ category in the Scottish Civic Trust's Buildings.”

A profile of Banks in the **Weekend Australian** (03/03/2007) revealed that after leaving university Iain lived in a Middlesex squat at the same time as Ken MacLeod.

The South African **Sunday Times** (04/03/2007) mentioned its profile of Mark Shuttleworth, the IT entrepreneur, but famous as a space tourist, is a fan of Iain M Banks.

Despite having mentioned selling his cars in his interview with Mark Lawson back in November, at least one blogger expressed cynicism that it seemed convenient that this came out whilst Banks was publicising his new book. Mark MacAskill in the **Sunday Times** (04/04/2007) discussed Peter James's criticism of “celebrities such as Iain Banks for succumbing to “green tyranny” by ditching their luxury cars to boost their environmental credentials.” Banks talked more about the subject to Rob Ryan in the **Sunday Times** (13/05/2007). He commented that, “there was no great moment of epiphany”, rather, “one day, one of the cars needed an MOT, and I thought: why don't I just get rid of them?”

The *Garbadale* publicity round saw Iain as the subject of the **Mail on Sunday's** ‘Tracks

of my Life’ article (04/04/2007). The geek in Iain Banks was happy to reveal, “I have two 60GB iPods,” he says. “I currently have 26,125 songs, taking up 102.29GB - a total of 27-and-a-half days' listening.” Amongst the tracks Iain namechecked are: ‘Bridge Over Troubled Water’, the song he had his first kiss to; ‘This Is The Sea’, his favourite driving music, and ‘For A Dancer’ by Jackson Browne, the song he wants played at his funeral. Led Zeppelin I and II were the first records he bought.

The **Morning Star** (07/04/2007) reported that Iain was supporting the Unite Against Fascism campaign to highlight the fact that the BNP were fielding so many candidates that they may benefit from state funding of political parties.

Mike Lowson of the **Aberdeen Press and Journal** (14/04/2007) concentrated on the driving side of Iain's persona, and got him to reveal his first car was a blue Mark I Cortina Estate, his worst car was an orange Mark II Escort, the one he misses the most is the BMW M5, and the technically best was the 911 Turbo. It was a Porsche that he crashed in on the A9, and although Iain finds Ferraris aspiration they (and Lamborghinis) are just too wide for the roads he drives down in Scotland.

The **Irish Times** (17/04/2007), for no readily apparent reason available in the Sainsbury's in the centre of Cambridge, looks to have had a scoop that has gone un-noticed elsewhere. Talking about his passport situation with Louise East she made a comment about not being on the honours list soon to which Banks replied, “I was actually offered an OBE years ago. I was going to be Obe-Wan Banksie.” Adding, “But, no, I couldn't do it. The whole honours-list thing is just not me.”

The **Evening News** (22/05/2007) reported that in May Iain presented an environmental award to Queen Margaret University for the sustainability of its new campus at Craighall.

Robert Wright writing about his work as a bookseller in Leeds in the **Guardian** (16/06/2007) mentioned “We would also get occasional visitations from the likes of Iain Banks, a nice man who laughed at my jokes

and Terry Pratchett, a serious man who didn't."

Gabby Logan, the TV sports presenter, in a 'My Media' article for the **Guardian** (25/06/2007) mentioned that recent favourite books "include Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* and Iain Banks' *The Steep Approach to Garbadale*."

The **Guardian** (26/06/2007) had a letter signed by "Peter Poslethwaite, Julie Christie, Iain Banks, John Pilger, Harold Pinter, Rose Gentle, Tony Benn, Gemma Tumelty, Lindsey German and thousands of others" that urged the newly installed Prime Minister "to withdraw British troops from Iraq no later than October 2007."

Chris Boardman, the Olympic medal winning cyclist and now ITV Tour de France commentator was profiled in the **Telegraph** (24/07/2007), asked the question: "Who would you like to invite to dinner and why?" The four people mentioned in his answer were: Dave Gorman, Bill Clinton, Gandhi, and Iain M Banks. Maybe they could all have a curry, but for Messers Gandhi and Gorman it would have to be vegetarian.

The **Evening News** (27/06/2007) reported that Iain "has joined a campaign to save a right of way used by bathers in the famous Loony Dook from a five-storey hotel extension." Following up (18/07/2007) the same paper said that over 800 people had signed the petition including Ken MacLeod.

Derren Brown's *Trick of the Mind* Series 2 is out on DVD. This includes the episode with Iain as a guest. Brown writes down a word that then turns out to be the word that Iain picks when given a completely free choice of any word from any of his novels. See **Banksoniain** #6 for coverage of the initial broadcast.

*Brave New Words: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction*, was first published in October 2006. A very readable work that claims it "shows exactly how science-fictional words and their associated concepts have developed over time." It does what it says on the tin. There are a few citations of various Iain M Banks works. ISBN: 0195305671.

## Garbadale News

Rounding up the TV, radio, print and personal appearances of the author when publicising his latest book.

Iain was interviewed by Peter Capaldi for BBC 2's **The Culture Show** (24/02/2007). Capaldi had played Uncle Rory in the TV adaptation of *The Crow Road*, and also narrated quite a few of his books when audio abridgements were made of them in the 1980s. See **Banksoniain** #10.

Capaldi arrived at an unidentified Scottish castle by public train and taxi, whilst Banks turned up in his new Lexus, and they chatted outside about the fictional Scots Baronial style of Garbadale before their fireside chat inside. Peter brought up the fact that many of Iain's characters fall in love with their cousins and the author admitted that he probably fell in love with his cousin Jane.

Capaldi voiced the suicide scene from *Garbadale* over a series of sky, loch and landscape footage, and Iain revealed that the final step off only occurred to him as he was writing the scene. The interview then moved onto *The Crow Road*, with a clip of the actor playing Uncle Rory. Peter talked about the freshness of playing recognisable Scottish characters, whilst Iain commented that his male protagonists were "basically me, but in an idealised form, i.e. taller, handsomer, younger, thinner of waist and more successful with the ladies."

Iain appeared on the Sky Arts programme, **The Book Show** (01/02/2007), hosted by Mariella Frostrup. The host managed to mention a book called *The Player of Dreams* and claimed that *The Algebraist* was a Hugo winner in her introduction to the interview that was disappointingly short, but somewhat tortuous at times.

Ms Frostrup asked about the speed of writing *Dead Air*, as well as how Banks decides to write an M or a non-M book before moving onto the new book and commenting that there seemed to be some re-occurring themes. Mariella seemed particularly keen that the main family were very rich, but Iain commented that this just made them more

flexible to write about, being able to travel and also that the book is about how you can stay true to your family. They then touched on the politics within *Garbadale* before talking about the difference between the science fiction and the mainstream. Frostrup asked whether he was becoming a more political writer in his mainstream since the fantasy element of his writing has been expressed in the science fiction. Iain said this was fair comment but added that he wanted to make the next mainstream book more like *The Bridge*, the last book he wrote before he split personas.

Returning later in the show Iain had a well-thumbed paperback copy of Alan Moore's *Voice of the Fire* to add to the shelf of author's favourites that a viewer would win at the end of the series. He explained that it made such an impression on Banks because he didn't think he could have written the book himself whereas with most fiction he reads he feels he could have turned his hand to that if he wanted. Pressed to pick something from his formative years Banks mentioned *Catch 22* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as books that made an impact on him before he developed his own voice.

An early turnout saw Iain on the **BBC Breakfast News** sofa with Dermot and Sian just before five to nine (05/03/2007). A quick explanation of the plot of *Garbadale* from the author was followed by a quick discussion of game playing, before the title of the book was brought up and Iain explained how it was about the choice between the easy and hard routes to the house, and how that was analogous to a person's choice of how they live their life. Perhaps stung by some of the comments about writing *Dead Air* in six weeks, Iain has taken to explaining his working practices in a little more detail. He said the actual typing takes about three months, but that there usually "three months of hard thought before that", and six months of getting ready, so that the "whole process takes a year".

The greening of Iain Banks was the next subject of the conversation and Iain explained the motivation and the regenerative breaking of his new car. From this the discussion

moved onto how global warming was touched on in the book and Banks explained how it fitted the theme of one generations mistakes being corrected, over-corrected, or even made worse by the next generation.

Another interview with Mark Lawson, this time on the Radio 4 programme **Front Row** (07/03/2007), saw Iain explain that he originally wanted *Garbadale* to be a more complicated book with a fantasy element with the characters "caught up inside the game". It was an idea that Banks could not get to work without seeming silly and so it ended up being focussed on the family saga side of the story. Lawson also brought up the parts of the book that are narrated by Tango, and the question of how to write less educated characters. Banks related how the first draft was written in "with multiple first person narratives" which again was not quite working and so Tango's was the only one that survived to the final version.

Lawson, or his researcher, had been onto the Iain Banks Forum and discovered that Iain is referred to in shorthand as TMH (The Man Himself). Iain said he had only been there once but his girlfriend had read more of it than he had. At alt-fiction Iain was presented with a TMH cap.

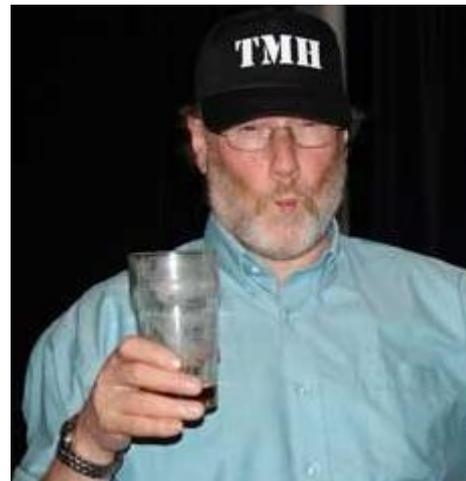


Photo by Simon H Johnson

A couple more chatty national radio appearances saw Banks talk to Simon Mayo 5Live (06/03/2007) and then Phil Jupitus 6Music (07/03/2007). During the latter of these which was after a 'gig' in a Hove theatre Banks said that he had finally got round to asking the audience by a show of

hands and “was amazed by how much of a cross-over there was” as he had had no idea and previous guesses had been anywhere between 5% and 50%. A poster on the Iain Banks Forum estimated the show of hands as about 40% of the audience that had read both M and non-M, another 40% that just read the non-M, with the remainder split between those that just read the M, and some who had not read any Banks at all, but still went to see him anyway.

On the provincial radio circuit Iain appeared Radio Scotland’s **The Book Café** and Radio Ulster’s **Artsextra** on the same day 05/03/2007. Both interviews asked about it being five years since his last book, *Raw Spirit* and *The Algebraist* either having escaped their attention or not being considered proper books, although both interviews did touch on the author’s science fiction works.

The anti-Americanism was discussed and Iain said he was against the current administration but not the country per se. He did admit, however, that there was a hint of caricature in the silly names of the American corporate types. Feaguing comes from the verb the **Oxford English Dictionary** defines as “to put ginger up a horse’s fundament, to make him lively and carry his tail well”, whilst Tony Fromlax comes from Los Angeles to New York. Spraint, the name of the company, is the dung of wild animals such as otters and deer when used for marking their territory.

Iain admitted that the name of the family in *Garbadale* was a private joke to do with the typo he often makes when attempting to type would. It would seem to be a mistake that other makes with a web search showing 27,400 pages with the word (and that is discounting the ones that also mention the word *Garbadale*). He added that he should probably have Googled for it to check that it was not a real name but he had not.

The title of the book, *The Steep Approach to Garbadale*, was discussed in Banks’s Hay-on-Wye appearance. One of the questioners asked, “Which came first, the title or the story?” To which Iain replied that nobody, not even him, was happy with the two working titles that the book had (*Empire* and

*Matter*). Then the phrase he eventually used struck him, he thought it was a good title but had little to do with the book and so went back and rewrote the section where Alban finishes his walk. In an interview in the **Herald** (24/02/2007) the author had commented that the title had been influenced by his learning to fly. “I was always thinking of it as downwards”, adding “the only person who got it first time was my cousin, who flies 747-400s.”

The **Bookseller** (09/03/07) reported that *The Steep Approach to Garbadale* was the most reviewed book between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> March, but that the reaction was mixed. In the **FT** (03/03/2007) James Lovegrove commented, “It’s perhaps less fiery going down than before - but it still packs an intoxicating kick.” Rebecca Wigod in the Saskatoon **StarPhoenix** of (12/05/2007) picked the book as the Editor’s choice. **Publishers Weekly** (23/07/2007) finishes its review with the comment that Banks’s “23rd book isn’t his best, but it carries one all the way up its craggy steeps.” The **Express** (02/03/2007) said “enjoyable enough but compelling? Well, not really.”

Charles Shaar Murray, a long time Banks reviewer, said in the **Independent** (02/03/2007) “a master off his game is still a master. Banks’s evocation of the tortures and travails of first love is moving and lyrical; his account of Fielding’s attempt to use a laptop PowerPoint presentation to convince a pair of dotty old great-aunts is effective farce, and his description of a woman preparing her suicide is utterly scarifying.” He concluded, “When he’s match-fit, Banks makes it all seem so effortless. So it comes as a shock when we see too much of the scaffolding.”

The **Bookseller** chart of Original Fiction saw *Garbadale* enter at #7 for the weekend ending 03/03/2007, drop a single place the next week, then hold at twelve for the two weeks after that before dropping out of the top twenty. It was ‘Book of the Month’ in both Waterstones and Borders.

The UK paperback is due out on March 1<sup>st</sup> 2008. The US hardback is published on October 5<sup>th</sup>.

# Complicity

There is a whole book about Banks's 1993 mainstream novel. Called *Iain Banks's Complicity: A Reader's Guide* it was written by Cairns Craig, and published by Continuum International Publishing Group in 2002. At the time of publication the author was Head of the English Literature Department at the University of Edinburgh.

The work covers 'The Novelist', 'The Novel', 'The Novel's Reception' and 'The Novel on Film'. It is well worth seeking out for as a general background to Banks's work and not just for its concentration on *Complicity*. Craig discusses the book in relation to typical Banksian themes of playing games, narrative doubles and sexual transgression. He described the book as using the "format of the thriller to explore the relationship between the present and the past", and puts the novel in its near historical context, with the action of the book taking place in the time period 1991-2, in the aftermath of Thatcherism but very much of the eighties. Indeed the former prime minister gets more mentions than the then current one. Banks has revealed his owns a copy of Thatcher's *The Path to Power* augmented with a nut and bolt.<sup>1</sup>

The **Guardian** (09/06/1999) summed the book up thus: "Investigative journalism takes a disturbing twist when the one being investigated is drug-abusing hack Cameron Colley. He senses a scoop when looking into a series of brutal, politically motivated murders, but inadvertently becomes a prime suspect. A twisted tale of shocks and coincidences."

**New Statesman & Society** (03/09/1993) called it the "first politically correct serial killer", whilst the **Herald** (11/09/1993) said Banks "has returned the novel to its status as a medium for debate", although the review from the **Globe and Mail** (13/11/1993) commented "the story leaves you dizzily dissatisfied". Nicholas Royle in the **Guardian** (12/10/1993) was most effusive, "For its ingenious construction, and the adroitness with which Banks switches

<sup>1</sup> Justine Harkness, 'Cultured Dissident'; Weekend Australian (Mar 3, 2007)

between past and present, *Complicity* is as daring and brilliant as his third novel *The Bridge*. For verve and pace, it's his best yet." The hardback and paperback releases both spent a number of weeks in the UK bestseller charts.

An interesting set of views on the book were reported by Aislinn McCormick in a Reading Group Report article for **The Bookseller**<sup>2</sup>. One of the members of a group at Highdown Prison had chosen *Complicity* for them to discuss as he liked Banks's SF works. The book's violence "was not considered gratuitous, but rather essential to the moral questions raised" by all the inmates, but they were split on whether the protagonist was justified or not in his actions, with many being able to identify with "Andy's inability to fit into society and the way he was let down by some people in his life."

Iain was quoted in the **Independent** (24/04/1993) before publication of *Complicity* as saying, "It's going to annoy a lot of people - I hope." The perceived depravity of a number of Banks's book sometimes leads to questions about the happiness of his childhood. Banks has a well-worn story about the launch party for *Canal Dreams* where he Iain pointed such a questioner in the direction of his mother, and later heard her voice say: "Och no. Iain was always a happy wee boy". Banks has also admitted that his nickname at school was smiler<sup>3</sup>.

*Complicity* has been published in German, Italian, Japanese, French (as *Homme de Glace*), Polish, Spanish, Hebrew, Danish, Korean, Finish with a few editions for the United States as well, and the Turkish and Estonian rights have been sold.

The book does have a happy ending. It just that it is not at the end and not for itself. In chapter five, Cameron is drinking with his friend Al who later gets a bunch of flowers for his wife Andi. These are the main characters from *The Bridge*.

<sup>2</sup> Aislinn McCormick 'Ends justify the means: the all-male Highdown Prison reading group saw an anti-establishment angle in *Complicity*'; *The Bookseller* (Jun 3, 2005)

<sup>3</sup> Catherine Lockerbie, 'Celebrating the year of debating dangerously'; *The Scotsman* (Aug 19, 1998)

## The Film

The only Banks work to have so far been turned into a motion picture *Complicity* was made by many of the same people who had been behind the successful production of *The Crow Road* mini-series for the BBC.

The credits describe the film as “Carlton Films presents, in association with the Scottish Arts Council National Lottery Fund a Talisman production. Developed with the assistance of British Screen Finance Ltd.” The production company, Talisman, had bought the option in the Autumn of 1993 soon after the publication of the book. Pretty much all of Banks’s work has been optioned at one point or another, and this is no great indicator that a film will eventually get made.

Bryan Elsley was brought on board as the screenwriter and Gavin Millar as the director to develop the project, which was held up by the BBC production of *The Crow Road*. Initial reports, e.g. **Daily Mail** and **The Mirror** (23/09/1997) stated Ewan McGregor was in the frame for the role of Andy.

**Screen Finance** reported that J&M Entertainment had green-lighted the production of the film in a May 1998 edition<sup>4</sup>, expecting shooting to start in September. More mainstream press coverage attached Johnny Lee Millar to the lead role in late 1998, and put the budget at seven million pounds<sup>5</sup> with half a million of that coming from the lottery<sup>6</sup>.

A number of the actors from *The Crow Road* made appearances in the film including Bill Paterson, Paul Young and Valerie Edmond. The latter’s role was inserted into the screenplay in order to develop some tension in Colley’s workplace. Other changes included reducing the number of murders because of the screen time that they take up.

Filming took place at various locations around Scotland centred on Edinburgh in late 1998 / early 1999 and released in the

following year in a cut that was two seconds under one hundred minutes. The BBFC, not unexpectedly, gave it an 18 certificate citing “strong sex, sexual violence, violence, horror, drugs use and coarse language”.

The film had a limited theatrical release on twenty-two screens in Scotland<sup>7</sup>. Carlton Films at the time of the film’s release owned Central Television. This meant that it played for a week in the English midlands, supported (I seem to recall) by some TV advertising. So I did actually get to see the film on the big screen in a cinema in Nottingham, along with seven other people there for the evening’s showing. In 2002 it was reported that the film had grossed less than £100,000 at the UK box office<sup>8</sup>.

Critical reaction was mixed. The **Scotsman** (29/01/2000) said, “It desperately needs focus and that technical term, oomph.” but was more generous when it reviewed the video (15/06/2000) calling it “a reasonably entertaining yarn that shleps around Edinburgh and the Highlands.” When the film is brought up at a Banks Q&A session he usually tells the story of meeting an acquaintance in his home village who commented that it was “like a long episode of *Taggart*”. The **Daily Record** (28/01/2000) quoted Iain as being “rather miffed” that the film didn’t have a “glitzy premiere”, and the director, Gavin Millar, expressed some exasperation at the limited release.<sup>7</sup>

The UK DVD was released by Entertainment in Video in June 2000. The disk also contains the trailer and a twenty-one minute ‘Making Of’ piece, which includes an interview with Iain Banks as well as various members of the cast and crew along with behind the scenes footage.

The film was released as *Retribution* in the North American market, a title that loses some of the subtlety of the original one with the reader/viewer being complicit in the killings. This may have been because of the existence of a 1999 film called *Complicity* directed by Antonio D’Agostino.

<sup>4</sup> Screen Finance (May 28, 1998)

<sup>5</sup> Brian Pendreigh ‘Sick Boy actor returns to big screen as a hack’; **The Scotsman** (Nov 20, 1998)

<sup>6</sup> Nick Thorpe, ‘Scottish Arts Council may fund rock music’ (Jan 29, 1999)

<sup>7</sup> Ben Atherton, ‘What Jon Did On The Banks Of The Forth’; **Evening News** (Jan 27, 2000)

<sup>8</sup> Brian Pendreigh, ‘Local Heroes Missing Out On The Big Picture’, **Scotland on Sunday** (Dec 1, 2002)

# Matter

## What we know so far

**N.B.** This article brings together the public statements of the author about his new book, along with information from the publisher. If you wish to know nothing about it before it is published do **not** read on.

*Garbadale* was published six months late. Three months of this was Iain's fault, but the remainder was down to the publishers having to fit the book into their own revised schedule. Banks's original plan was to write *Matter* in the first three months of 2007, but as this meant that he was writing the book during the publicity tour for *Garbadale* he added a month on to the schedule.

On the first leg of the *Garbadale* tour was the Aye Write event in Glasgow (25<sup>th</sup> February) and Iain said he had about 108,000 words done which was roughly halfway. At this stage Banks actually mentioned three possible titles, and referred to it first as *The Integrity of Objects* before later saying that it could also be called *The Expeditionary* or *Matter*. His brief description of the book mentioned "a Culture agent", "a lippy drone", it was "set on a shell-world", there would be "murder and mayhem", and overall it would have an "Elizabethan tragedy feel".

A questioner at a *Garbadale* appearance in Hove (05/03/2007) asked whether the new book adhered to the Culture tradition of being chronologically consecutive. It is.

By Easter (in early April) Gary Lloyd reported that Iain was up to 160,000 words. Gary also said that he had been discussing the book when visiting Scotland in December. Whilst they were playing pool Iain was going "on and on like never before about his new book", and about mathematics in the book in reference to the aforementioned shell-worlds, and Gary went on to describe him as being very excited about writing this one. Later on in the creation process Iain emailed Gary asking what musical chord he would use to describe the Culture. To find the answer – read the book carefully when it comes out.

Iain read the prologue from the book at the climax of the one-day Derby SF event 'alt-

fiction' (28<sup>th</sup> April) to much acclaim. Even the Orbit website links to a "covert" YouTube recording of it, just search for the obvious keywords. Banks also commented that he had delivered the first draft on the preceding Wednesday.

An interview was published in **The Guardian** (25<sup>th</sup> May) to coincide with Banks's Hay-on-Wye appearance. In it Banks is quoted as saying, "It's a real shelf-breaker", continuing, "it's 204,000 words long and the last 4,000 consist of appendices and glossaries. It's so complicated that even in its complexity it's complex. I'm not sure the publishers will go for the appendices, but readers will need them."

In the actual Hay-on-Wye appearance talking to Claire Armistead (30<sup>th</sup> May) Banks was talking about not liking to do research, and was then asked whether the science fiction novels were harder as they had to have a logical consistency. Iain replied that "complexity is fun to get into and work with", adding that *Matter*, "had three sets of major characters" that he flitted between. He also said that he was attempting to keep thoughts about his next book out of his head until *Matter* had been edited.

A synopsis of the book appeared on the Little Brown website in July: "There was nobody of her own kind within several thousand light years of where Djan Seriy Anaplian sat. However, news from her home world of Sursamen would still reach her. Djan Seriy Anaplian is, after all, a member of Special Circumstances - a troubleshooter for the Culture, intervening when necessary to ensure that order and balance is maintained throughout the galaxy; and Special Circumstances get to hear about most things. The news itself, unfortunately, is not good. Her father has died. Her brother too, it seems. Both in the latest war against a neighbouring kingdom. Anaplian must journey home, but while she does so, another will seek her out. For someone on Sursamen believes her to be their last hope. What neither of them know is that she might also be the last hope for the entire world."

*Matter* is published in both the UK and US in February 2008.

# World Book Club

## The Wasp Factory

The BBC World Service book programme, **World Book Club**, recorded an edition with Iain Banks about *The Wasp Factory* on the evening of 1<sup>st</sup> March 2007. This took place in a small studio in Bush House with an audience of about thirty that had applied for tickets by suggesting questions.

It was very interesting to hear sustained questioning of the author on a single book. The interviewers at book festivals and on TV generally try to cover the whole of Banks's output (usually catering for someone who knows nothing) and the questioners at Q&As get to air their individual queries

Before the recording got underway there was a short talk from producer Oliver Jones, where we were also instructed not to be too reverential just because this was the BBC. If we wanted to applaud, cough whatever we could go ahead as it reassured the listeners that there was actually an audience.

Harriet Gilbert was the host, and the production team had picked out a number of questions from those that had been emailed in from around the world. The programme started with the presenter asking Iain about the controversy that surrounded the book's publication. Iain stated that he was of the opinion that any publicity was good publicity, as he was basically a nobody when the book came out, and all that he wanted was it to be successful enough for him to be able to write another one.

A quick summary of the back-story by Harriet, and a reading from Iain lead us into the questions. One early one was "Did you struggle with making Frank a sympathetic character, and worry about people not liking the book because they didn't like the character?" Iain said that he winged it to some extent, and it was probably the matter-of-factness of Frank that allowed readers to stick with it, who either got it as black comedy or didn't.

Moving on Banks was asked about the conception of the book and its influences. He replied that it was only when a sales rep

mentioned *Lord of the Flies* that he realised the debt he owed to William Golding, adding that he works from the top down and is not a character based writer, more interested in ideas and plot, "the characters have to do what they are damn well told". Iain also cited the influence of Ivor Cutler's work, especially the stories he told on John Peel's radio show.

A question phoned in from America asked if Banks had set out to write "a portrait of pathological narcissism?" Iain replied that he had not, but if it came out that way that was fine. Frank's self obsession and own religion was there to show that it was just as valid as any other religion. Iain revealed that he went to church with his mother and eventually asked his father why he didn't, and found out that it was not compulsory, and on his father's side he was third in a line of atheists.

Eric's justification for his actions by having a back-story that is missing from Frank and Angus was asked about. Iain said that he wanted Eric to be unhinged and not care, but Frank to be "rationally insane – too clever to get caught." This led onto a question about moral or political points about attitudes to mental health Banks was making in the book. "I wish I had" answered Iain, adding that Frank considered himself to be sane.

The ability of the author to kill off characters in interesting ways was raised with a question on whether anything was left out. Iain answered that he hadn't censored himself, and had accumulated all those ideas before he wrote the book. This was followed by an email asking how much of Frank's narration should the reader believe. "All of it." responded Iain. The only unreliable part is the attempt to contact his brother by telepathy.

The final questions concerned the dénouement of the book and when the final twist came. Iain commented that it was late in the planning stage when he thought of it, and so he inserted some clues into early sections, but the twist of the ending was ready before he started typing the book.

The programme is archived with over fifty other editions at the World Service website: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/programmes/world\\_book\\_club.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/programmes/world_book_club.shtml)

# Banks Obscura

## The Unpublished Works

As Banks often mentions in interviews he became an overnight success in 1984 with *The Wasp Factory* after writing about a million words over more than fifteen years. His debut novel was published on his thirtieth birthday in 1984 but he had been planning and working towards that day for the best part of two decades. At the age of eleven his class at school were asked to draw what they wanted to be when they grew up. Iain drew an actor, but wrote in the corner “and writer”<sup>9</sup>. He apparently still has the drawing in his possession.

The first named work Banks has admitted to writing is *The Hungarian Lift Jet*. The first version of this work was written in pencil when he was fourteen, although he thought it was a novel at the time it turned out to be only about 10,000 words, but a couple of years later (c. 1970) Banks returned to the work and expanded it to novel length (140,000 words). In a 1994 interview with Andrew Wilson, Banks admitted “I had just gone from being much influenced by Captain W. E. Johns and Biggles to having just read absolutely everything by Alistair MacLean I could lay my hands on.”<sup>10</sup> Banks came from a family that had a television set from early in his life and says that he was thinking in this vein, “making up stories in my head. Rather than novels, they were basically fictitious TV series similar to *The Man from UNCLE* or *Danger Man*.

The basic concept he outlined in the **Telegraph** interview is interestingly one that has recently been taken up by writers such as Anthony Horowitz and Charlie Higson in their adventure books for boys. “The secret service would have to employ a young, but very cunning and clever Scots boy, of whatever age I happened to be at the time. Hungary has invented this radical lift jet - a sort of hovering warplane - and the secret service had nicked it. It was just an excuse

9 William Leith, ‘A writer's life: Iain Banks’, *The Telegraph* (Nov 1, 2003)

10 Scottish Book Collector, available via Textualities at <http://www.textualities.net/writers/features-a-g/banksi01.php>

for vast amounts of mayhem. It all ended badly. Everybody died.”<sup>10</sup>

The next Banks work dates from his first year at university in Stirling and is called *TTR*, which stood for *The Tashkent Rambler*. This eventually reached 400,000 words and was heavily influenced by Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* and John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar*. This was the “book without a plan” that Iain mentioned in his Hay-on-Wye appearance, the one that had six separate groups of major characters. Those characters included, he had previously admitted to Andrew Wilson; Dahomme Brezhnev, Dogghart Jammaharry, Gropius Luckfoot and his unpleasant sidekick Toss MacAbre.<sup>10</sup> Iain's Guest of Honour speech at Eastcon, the 1990 Eastercon, also mentioned a character called Doc Hatch.

Ken MacLeod a school friend of Iain's, and read his early works. In a recent interview he gave his recollections of *TTR*: “very long satirical novel full of puns and characters with improbable names of which the least ridiculous was Gropius Luckfoot - a rich man, who as I recall is introduced thus: ‘Gropius Luckfoot was born with a chrome forcep in his mouth.’”<sup>11</sup> Ken went on to add that, “Iain collected many rejection slips for *TTR*”, and Banks has admitted to having it typed up and sending it to publishers and has even quoted the beginning of one the replies, “Due to the current paper shortage.”<sup>12</sup>

The book was a (then) near future satire where a Sino-Soviet border war in which the USA had come in on the side of the Chinese as they needed an opportunity to battle test some recently developed weapons. No-one wanted to control Mongolia and so it applied to join the United States. The book is set in the weeks leading up to ‘Dependence Day’ when it would be renamed *Mongoliana*.<sup>10</sup>

Also in Banks's personal slush pile is a book called *O*, which Iain wrote in 1984 between *Walking on Glass* and *The Bridge*. The work was turned down by his then editor at Macmillan, James Hale, see **Banksoniain #3**.

11 Paul Raven interview of Ken MacLeod.

<http://www.velcro-city.co.uk/interviews/science-fiction-and-politics-ken-macleod/>

12 *The Guardian Weekend* (Nov 27, 2004)

# Espedair Street

## The Tribute Album

In recent interviews, e.g. the BBC4 one with Mark Lawson (see **Banksoniain** #11), and also during the publicity tour for *Garbadale*, Iain has talked about his musical ambitions including the Frozen Gold tribute album.

The idea has been floating about for a couple of years (see **Banksoniain** #5), but earlier this year Anthony Barnes wrote a whole article in **The Independent** dedicated to the subject<sup>13</sup>, rather than it being an addendum to pieces about Banks's books, which indicated the project had legs of its own. I visited Iain's musical collaborator Gary Lloyd to get the latest news when I was Chester during Eastercon.

Gary has a home studio in the front room of his terraced house in Chester behind an unassuming green door. He explained the general approach that the two have taken with the songs before playing three examples to me. These are the arrangements that Iain and Gary created together and have approved for presentation to the artists that the pair are hoping to involve in the project. He played me three of the tracks.

'Misinterpretation' is mostly lush, complex electronics with clarinets in the middle. Iain plays both lead and bass guitar on 'Blind Again', which has a single chorus then emotional climax, followed by a coda where there is Iain's big guitar moment and he gets to do his David Gilmour impression. 'Answer & Question' is more of a rock song than the other two, with more of Banks's guitar playing, this time with an e-bow (an electronic bowing device). The final track was my favourite as it worked well without vocals, which are missing from all the demos.

The other tracks that can be expected on the album are: 'Frozen Gold' 'Across From the Moon and Down'; 'Hour Song'; 'You'd Never Believe'; 'Cry About You'; 'The Mercenary's Comment', and 'Espedair

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<sup>13</sup> Anthony Barnes; 'Iain Banks's cult 1987 novel inspires real-life musicians' *The Independent* (Mar 24, 2007)

Street'. Gary also hopes to be able to get 'Another Rainy Day' on there as well.

'Frozen Gold' was the group's first single and 'Another Rainy Day', the second, are mentioned in chapter 6, where we also find out that 'You'd Never Believe' was number one for three weeks. There are four lines of lyrics of 'Across From the Moon and Down' in chapter 13, and more lyrics for 'Cry About You' and 'Espedair Street' in chapter 15.

For the tribute album the collaboration between Gary and Iain is bringing the tracks into the twenty-first century. The basis is always Iain's original melodies, the ones which were whistled into a tape-recorder back in Banks's student days, which Gary describes as being "pretty accomplished". The next step in the process has been for the pair to carefully develop the melodies further, decide upon chord voicing and finally record arrangements with whatever instrumentation serves each song best.

Over the years much of the project has been undertaken in Iain's house where he now has his own recording room. This is where the author shelves all the editions of his own books that he has including the editions that foreign publishers have sent him, it also contains his Persian rugs, designer sofa and Thunderbird toys. There are three occupied guitar stands, with a spare for when Gary visits, as well as rack synthesizers and a mixing desk, although as in Gary's own studio the most important element is the Mac computer that can be called on to replicate any required sound.

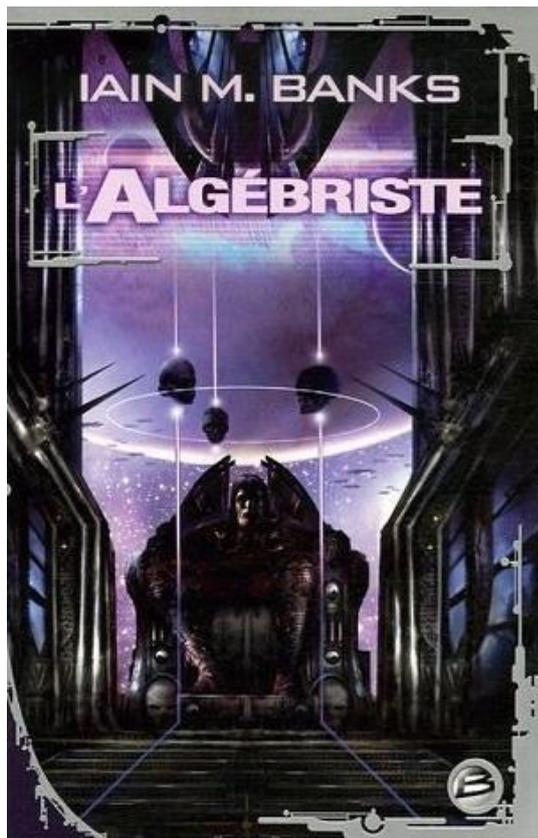
Once they both have other commitments out of the way Gary will be heading up to Scotland in about mid-August to complete the demos, and then use them to get the artists to commit to the project. Iain and Gary have a number of singers lined up, which they have already approached, but cannot reveal any details yet.

It was at the launch of *Espedair Street* in 1987 that Gary and Iain first met, after the musician expressed an interest in an audio rendition of *The Bridge* (see **Banksoniains** #3 & #6). Twenty years later we may soon have the album of the book.

## International Editions

The French have an edition of *L'Algébriste* (The Algebraist) translated by Nenad Savic that was published in September 2006 by Bragelonne. It has an impressive cover by Stephan Martiniere who has a website (in English) that is worth checking out: <http://www.martiniere.com/>

Stephan has also done covers for other Bragelonne authors including Ken MacLeod.



Stephan Martiniere's cover for *L'Algébriste*

In the meantime the Spanish have reason to celebrate with the end of May publication of *El Puente* (The Bridge) translated by Paula Serna Gamissans, which followed *Pensad En Flebas* (Consider Phlebas) that was published in March and translated by Albert Sole.

One of the by-products of the sale of Little Brown to Hachette from TimeWarner has been the development of a greater worldwide presence for Orbit, the imprint that publishes Iain M Banks.

Tim Holman, the publishing director of the new company, has moved to New York to oversee the launch, and although Orbit US

and Orbit UK are separate companies with different lists of authors they will both be publishing Iain M. Banks. Earlier in his publishing career Tim was Iain's SF editor on books such as *Look to Windward*.

The US publishing schedule begins in September 2007, with *Matter* slotted in three weeks after its UK publication in February. Interestingly there are trade paperback releases of *Consider Phlebas* and *The Player of Games* listed for a month later. They then plan to release the rest of the Culture books, but this is still early days for the company.

For the new company there is a new website at <http://www.orbitbooks.net> although both the UK and US publishing schedules can be found on the site, along with blog entries from employees on either side of the Atlantic.

*The Steep Approach to Garbadale* has been picked up in the US by MacAdam Cage, and they are publishing a hardback edition on October 5<sup>th</sup>. Iain mentioned in his Hay-on-Wye talk that the American rights to *The Crow Road* have finally been sold.

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## The Wasp Factory

### Unabridged Audio-book

Someone at Hachette Audio has been looking through the Little Brown catalogue and discovered that only a select portion of the Iain Banks backlist has been released in unabridged audio-book format. So **The Wasp Factory** (previously only available in an abridgement read by Peter Capaldi) is listed for a pre-Christmas release. Peter Kenny, who narrated *The Steep Approach to Garbadale*, is the reader, and like that book it looks to be a CD only release. Peter recorded the book in July and expects it will be a little over eight hours in length.

ISBN: 1405503556.

Release Date: 1st Nov 2007

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**The Banksoniain** is available as a PDF from <http://efanzines.com>

If you have any corrections, comments, suggestions or contributions then email us at: [banksoniain@gmail.com](mailto:banksoniain@gmail.com)

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